

DELIBERATIVE PROCESS—DO NOT CITE OR SHARE
Bristol Bay Assessment
Web Content Update

January 13, 2014

I labeled this based on current tabs. If this is confusing/unclear, let me know. THANK YOU, CHARLES.

WHY WE'RE STUDYING THE WATERSHED:

Why We Studied the Bristol Bay Watershed

EPA conducted a scientific assessment of the Bristol Bay watershed to understand how large-scale mining could potentially affect water quality and salmon ecosystems in the Bristol Bay watershed—home to one of the largest sockeye salmon populations in the world and an area with significant mineral resources.

We launched the study in response to petitions from federally recognized tribes and others who wrote to EPA with concerns about how future large-scale mining could impact Bristol Bay fisheries. Other tribes and stakeholders requested that EPA wait for mining permit applications to determine the potential environmental impacts of mining. The assessment provides a better understanding of the Bristol Bay watershed and will inform consideration of large-scale development in the area.

The land area draining to Bristol Bay consists of six major watersheds: From west to east, the Togiak, Nushagak, Kvichak, Naknek, Egegik, and Ugashik River watersheds, and a series of smaller watersheds draining from the North Alaska Peninsula. Our assessment focuses primarily on the Nushagak and Kvichak River watersheds, the main areas in the watershed open to large-scale resource development.

What did we learn?

Salmon and other ecological resources

We characterized the region's ecological resources, particularly in terms of Pacific salmon, rainbow trout, and Dolly Varden in the Nushagak and Kvichak River watersheds. We also described the general condition of ecological resources in the Bristol Bay watershed, which include at least 29 fish species, 190 bird species, and more than 40 terrestrial mammal species in freshwater habitats.

Potential impacts of mining

We described the potential impacts of large-scale porphyry copper mining in the Bristol Bay watershed. Using publicly available mining plans for the Pebble deposit and existing information on mining, we used realistic mine scenarios to describe potential impacts of mining to salmon and salmon habitat, as well as resulting effects on wildlife and Alaska Native cultures.

Role of salmon in indigenous populations and economy

We described the role of salmon in Alaska Native cultures present in the Nushagak and Kvichak River watersheds. The Yup'ik and Dena'ina living in these watersheds are two of the last intact, sustainable salmon-based cultures in the world. There are 31 Alaska Native villages in the wider Bristol Bay region, 25 of which are located in the Bristol Bay watershed. Many residents depend on a salmon subsistence-based economy.

How was the assessment conducted?

EPA compiled a team of scientists with expertise in fisheries biology, mining, geochemistry, anthropology and other disciplines to develop the Bristol Bay Assessment. These experts reviewed existing information developed and compiled by the State of Alaska, federal and state resource agencies, the mining industry, tribes and scientists from around the world. The sources include peer-reviewed research published in scientific journals, state and federal agency reports, knowledge of agency staff, input from other experts, and knowledge from tribal Elders.

In May 2012, EPA submitted a draft assessment for public comment and independent scientific peer review. A revised draft was shared for public comment and peer review follow-up in April 2013. The peer reviewers were scientists and experts not involved in the assessment. We made changes to the revised draft and final assessment after reviewing all submitted comments.

PEER REVIEW SECTION:

Replace existing text with following:

The peer review process provided independent review of the Bristol Bay Assessment. Its purpose was to identify necessary improvements to the document prior to its being published as a final document.

EPA tasked Versar, an independent contractor, with conducting an external peer review of the May 2012 draft of the assessment. Versar assembled 12 independent experts, including specialists in the fields of mine engineering, salmon fisheries biology, aquatic ecology, aquatic toxicology, hydrology, wildlife ecology and Alaska Native cultures.

The peer reviewers evaluated the May 2012 draft assessment and provided a written review of the draft document. EPA considered this feedback as well as comments received during the six-day public comment period as it revised the May 2012 draft.

The same 12 peer reviewers conducted a follow-on peer review to evaluate whether the April 2013 draft of the assessment was responsive to their original comments. EPA considered these peer review comments, as well as comments received during the 60-day public comment period, as it revised the April 2013 draft.

Insert links to peer review RTC document and peer review reports.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT SECTION:

Change “Current Public Involvement” to “Public Involvement.”

Insert following text:

Stakeholder engagement was essential to ensure that EPA heard and understood the full range of perspectives on the assessment and the potential effects of mining in the Bristol Bay region.

- **Public and stakeholder meetings:** EPA visited many Bristol Bay communities, including Ekwok, Dillingham, Kokhanok, New Stuyahok, Koliganek, Iliamna, Newhalen, Nondalton, Naknek, King Salmon, Igiugig, and Levelock. EPA met with representatives from Bristol Bay tribal governments and corporations, as well as representatives from the mine industry, commercial fishers, seafood processors, hunters and anglers, chefs and restaurant owners, jewelry companies, conservation organizations, members of the faith community, and elected officials from Alaska and other states.
- **Intergovernmental Technical Team:** EPA met with an Intergovernmental Technical Team that provided input on the structure of the assessment and identified data sources. Participants included representatives from tribes, Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and Bureau of Land Management.
- **Tribal consultation:** EPA’s policy is to consult on a government-to-government basis with federally recognized tribal governments when EPA actions and decisions may affect tribal interests. Out of the 31 federally recognized tribes in the Bristol Bay region EPA invited to engage in tribal consultation, 20 tribes participated, including all 13 tribes with federally-recognized tribal governments in the Nushagak and Kvichak River watersheds.
- **ANCSA engagement:** EPA engaged with Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act Village and Regional Corporations throughout the assessment. EPA representatives traveled to Alaska to share information and receive input. ANCSA Corporations met with EPA officials in Iliamna, King Salmon, Anchorage, Seattle, and Washington, DC.
- **Public comments:** EPA released two drafts of the assessment for public comment. Approximately 230,000 and 896,000 comments were submitted to the EPA docket during the 60-day public comment period for the May 2012 and April 2013 drafts of the assessment, respectively. EPA held eight public comment meetings in June 2012, in Dillingham, Naknek, New Stuyahok, Nondalton, Levelock, Igiugig, Anchorage, and Seattle. Approximately 2,000 people attended these meetings.

In addition, the public was invited to nominate qualified scientists as potential peer reviewers and to provide oral comments and observe discussion among the peer reviewers during a peer review meeting in August 2012.

All public and peer review comments can be accessed online. View public comments at [regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov).

EPA has provided responses to both peer review and public comments. These responses can be accessed online

Fact Sheets

- Bristol Bay Assessment Fact Sheet - April 2013

TRIBAL ENGAGEMENT SECTION:

With 229 federally-recognized tribal governments in Alaska, 19 distinct language areas, and six distinct cultural regions, Alaska Native tribes are a significant presence in the state. Their connection to the land and dependence on it are factors EPA considers when working on environmental issues in Alaska.

Fourteen of the Bristol Bay watershed's 25 villages and communities are within the Nushagak and Kvichak River watersheds. Thirteen of the 14 communities have federally recognized tribal governments and a majority Alaska Native population. The salmon runs of Bristol Bay serve as a major subsistence food source and provide many Native residents with income. They also are the basis for Alaska Native culture, social relations, and spirituality.

Bristol Bay tribes petition EPA

EPA launched the Bristol Bay Assessment in response to petitions from federally recognized tribes and others who wrote to EPA with concerns about how large-scale mining could impact Bristol Bay fisheries. Other tribes and stakeholders requested that EPA wait for mining permit applications to determine the potential environmental impacts of mining. The assessment provides a better understanding of the Bristol Bay watershed and will inform consideration of development in the area.

In May 2012, EPA held public meetings in Bristol Bay villages to hear directly from Alaska Native residents. Tribal input was a vital component of the assessment.

The role of traditional knowledge

Tribes have special knowledge of the Bristol Bay watershed because they have lived there for thousands of years. This is referred to as *traditional knowledge*.

Two anthropologists with extensive experience in Alaska documented traditional knowledge in the Nushagak and Kvichak River watersheds. They interviewed 53 elders and other culture bearers who were identified as authoritative sources of information about subsistence, traditional ecological knowledge, nutrition, social relations and spiritual aspects of their culture. This information is included in the Bristol Bay Assessment.

A government-to-government relationship

EPA has an obligation to work with tribes on a *government-to-government* basis on decisions or activities that impact them. The concept of tribes as sovereign nations and has been affirmed by the courts, Congress and the President.

The tribal governments in the Bristol Bay watershed have an opportunity to engage the federal government on decisions impacting watershed resources in a process called tribal consultation.

EPA engaged tribes in official government-to-government meetings as part of the Bristol Bay Assessment. We held discussions and informational community meetings with tribal members, tribal village corporations and non-profit organizations.

Our engagement with tribes was a consistent thread from start to finish of the assessment. As year-round, lifelong residents, Alaska Natives have a great stake in the Bristol Bay watershed's future.

ADDITIONAL:

Changes for the Main Page:

- **Replace executive summary link and assessment link to final document**
- **Replace fact sheet with FS for final**
- **Change box on homepage showing “comment period closed” to “peer review” and link to peer review reports and EPA response to peer review comments.**
- **If we can have one of the revolving photos link to the press release, that might be convenient. Or not? Maybe not the right place.**

NEW PAGE AT BACK: Links to Additional Information

- **2013 Revised Assessment Document**
- **2012 Draft Assessment Document**
- **2013 Public Comment Docket**
- **2012 Public Comment Docket**
- **Previous Fact Sheets**
 - **April 2013**
 - **May 2012**
 - **Jan 2012**
 - **April 2011**
- **Outline for Bristol Bay Assessment February 2011**
- **Previous News Releases(?)**